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LECTURE  
ON THE  
BEST METHODS  
OF  
TEACHING THE LIVING LANGUAGES.

DELIVERED BEFORE THE  
AMERICAN INSTITUTE,

AUGUST 24, 1832.

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## TEACHING THE LIVING LANGUAGES.

MR PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN :

*Belmont* THE most important characteristic of a living language, — the attribute in which resides its essential power and value, — is, that it is a spoken one ; that it serves for that constant and principal bond of union between the different individuals of a whole nation, without which, they could not, for a moment, be kept together as a community. This great and prevalent characteristic is, therefore, everywhere visible in its structure, arrangements and expression ; hardly less so in books, than in conversation. The main object, indeed, to which every other is sacrificed, in the formation of a language is, to facilitate personal intercourse ; to enable one human being, in the easiest and most direct manner, to communicate to another his thoughts and his wants, his feelings and his passions ; and to this great object every living language is essentially, and, it may almost be said, is exclusively adapted in its vocabulary, its forms, its inflexions, idioms and pronunciation.

The easiest and best method, therefore, for persons of all ages and all classes to learn a living language is undoubtedly to learn it as a spoken one ; since this is not only its paramount characteristic, but is the only foundation on which the written language has been built or can rest. Persons, then, who have the opportunity, should learn the living language they wish to possess, as it is learnt by those to whom it is native. They should reside where it is constantly spoken, and use it, as it is used around them. It should be the minister to their hourly wants, and the medium of their constant

intercourse. Even the books they read should be chosen with reference to the habits and peculiarities of the spoken idiom that produced them, and in studying the language itself, it should be pursued less as a foreign language than as one which they may claim among their birthrights. This is the natural method, and is, no doubt, the most effectual and the easiest.

Only a few persons however are able or willing to avail themselves of it. If we wish to instruct our children in a foreign language, we find it inconvenient and unwise to send them among strangers, in a strange land to learn it: and, if we undertake to teach them at home, we shall hardly be disposed, like Montaigne's father, to surround them only with those who speak no other than the one we wish them to acquire. In the vast majority of cases, therefore, we must resort to means somewhat more artificial and indirect; and, while still endeavoring to teach it as a living and a spoken language, use the best method within our power at home.

What, then, is this best method? For this is precisely the question you have done me the honor to propose to me; and as it is entirely plain and practical in its nature and objects, I shall not venture, in the reply I may endeavor to make to it, to go in any respect beyond the limits of my personal experience and observation, or wish to say anything which is not as perfectly plain and practical as the question itself.

Before, however, we enter on the topics it involves, it may be necessary to premise, that there is no *one* mode of teaching languages, applicable to all classes and characters, or to persons of all the different ages and different degrees of preparation, who present themselves to be taught. Instruction in this branch of education, even more than in most others, cannot, without great violence and injustice to a large proportion of the pupils, be managed upon a Procrustes system of stretching all who have not the proper intellectual size, till they are brought to it, and of cutting down all who are grown beyond its proportions, till they are sufficiently reduced to fit its demands. On the contrary, it is, perhaps, the most important part of the duties of a teacher in the living languages, and the highest exercise of his skill, to select from the different systems and modes in use, what may be most appropriate to the whole class of pupils submitted to his care, and then to endeavor again to ac-

commodate and arrange what he has thus selected for the whole of his pupils to the individual capacities, dispositions and wants of each. Thus it is plain, that a method adapted to children seven or eight years old, would be altogether unsuited to persons in the maturity of their faculties ; — and, even in the case of those of the same age, who might more naturally be thrown into the same class, it cannot be doubted, by persons accustomed to the business of instruction, that a mode entirely fitted to an individual already familiar with other languages and with philosophical grammar, would be no less entirely unfitted to one, who had gone through no such previous preparation, and who should come to his task without regular habits of study or acquisition.

But, though no universal method can be pointed out, which will suit all the individuals, who might pursue it ; and though even a general one, which might suit a particular class might need modifications in relation to some of its members ; still there are, no doubt, principles which may be ascertained and settled — principles, which rest on the nature and laws of the human faculties, and which it must, therefore, be important to understand rightly and to apply with judgment. Undoubtedly, too, experience and skill have long since discovered most of these principles, perhaps all of them ; and established land-marks, which, pointing out the way others have trodden with safety or success, may prevent us, if we are wise, from making impossible experiments or falling into gross deviations. Bearing in mind, then, that something may be done by systems, though not so much, as is usually imagined or undertaken ; and especially remembering, that nothing can be done wisely, which has not a constant reference to the different classes, ages, and characters of the pupils to be instructed, I shall divide what I have to say on the best methods of teaching the Modern Languages according to the character and condition of the persons usually presenting themselves to be taught.

I. And first, of *little children*. It seems to be settled, that little children can be taught living languages easier than they can be taught anything else. The reason is, that it is the very vocation of their young minds to learn words. They have, indeed, done little during the short period of their existence, except to acquire the power of distinguishing objects and qualities, and of applying

to them the names which their native language has affixed to them. This power however, is so easily transferred to the acquisition of other living languages, that in Europe, where it is sometimes thought important to educate children to the free use of several, they are without difficulty taught to speak, read and write three or four without confounding them, from early infancy, merely by giving them nurses and attendants, who are natives of different countries. This method, of course, would not be pursued here. We have neither the means nor the motives for it. But it proves in the strongest manner, what the experience and observation of many among ourselves has confirmed, that much time is now lost in childhood or misapplied in instructions unsuited to its tender years, which might be successfully and pleasantly given to the acquisition of at least one living language.

The method of teaching however, should be no less skilfully and tenderly adapted to the age and circumstances of the pupil, than the pursuit itself. Of the Grammar, or the Dictionary, or any of the customary apparatus of formal instruction and recitation, there should be no thought. A child of six or seven years old can no more be made to comprehend the definition of an article or a verb, than he can be made to comprehend what is an abstract idea or a logarithm; but, if you will read several times over, to the same child, word by word, a clear translation of a very simple fable or story from the French or the Italian, or any other living language, making him follow you aloud step by step, and bringing the whole, by the simplicity of your explanations, fully down to the level of his comprehension, he will be able the next day so to translate it to you, in return, that he can not only give you the entire fable or story in its connexion, but the foreign word for every English one it contains, and the English for every foreign one, taken at random. We have a few books, and only a few, prepared to teach quite young children on this system. Bolmar's Edition of the Fables commonly called Perrin's, is one of them, well suited to its purpose, and none but those who have made the experiment can fully understand how easy it is for childhood to read and learn this book, and how much can thus be accomplished towards the final acquisition of the French language. Indeed, when a hundred pages have been thoroughly learnt in this way, not a few of the difficul-

ties of any modern language have been overcome ; and yet this certainly can be accomplished and has been accomplished with children of six or seven years old, who yet did not feel, in any part of the process, that a task had been imposed on them.

In selecting books, however, from which to teach according to this method, one rule must be carefully followed. Take only such as, in their subjects and ideas, their manner and their tone, are *below* the age of the child to be taught ; so that if the child you wish to instruct be seven years old and the language you have chosen be French, the books to be used should be such as are given to French children of four or five years old for their amusement. The reason is, that the child should have no difficulty to encounter but the mere difficulty of the language itself, and this will be found quite sufficient to make up for the difference in years, while, at the same time, the interest that might otherwise be wanting, is sustained by the instinctive curiosity to learn the meaning of new words, which belongs to the age, and the instinctive pleasure of discovery and progress which always belongs to our nature, and is then fresh and eager. Of course, books of this kind are easily procured ; for no country that has a literature is without books for its children. In French, which is the language where we should most need them, they are abundant ; and many of them have been reprinted in England, and some in this country. Besides these, Berquin's *Child's Friend*, many of Lafontaine's *Fables*, and many of Madame Guizot's *Tales*, with other similar works, may be added, which, when explained and understood, are as interesting to our children as they are to those for whom they were written. How long this process should be continued, must depend on the judgment of the teacher ; but as it is one that is both useful and amusing to the child, there is no reason, why it should not be carried very far. Certainly, it must not be given up, until the reading such books as are suited to his years, has become, without assistance from his instructor, as easy and pleasant as it had been with it.

This, too, is the period, when vocabularies and dialogues, like the Abbé Bossut's and those of Mad. de Genlis, can be used with great effect, because the extreme facility with which they are committed to memory in early youth, especially after some little progress has been made in reading, renders the whole exercise a plea-

sure and not a toil. Above all, this is the period for acquiring a just pronunciation, since the organs are now flexible, and permit that to be done easily, which, later, it is often impossible to do at all. Nor is this an unimportant part of the needful instruction. It is, to a language, what a costume is to an age or his physiognomy to an individual ; and not a few of the characteristic differences between different languages are lost to him, who has no perception of their several inflexions and no familiarity or sympathy with the effects of that peculiar accent and intonation, in which resides so much of the power of poetical rhythm and measure, as well as of the grace and harmony of all polished style in prose.

When, however, the child has attained a reasonable facility in reading, we may venture to look for some assistance towards the Grammar and the Dictionary ; — not, indeed, to compel him to learn his lessons by turning over leaves, which his young hands have not yet even the mechanical aptitude to do with much effect, and still less to endeavor to carry him through the purgatory of definitions in the accidence, and of rules and constructions and exceptions in the syntax, as if this were the only or even the efficient mode of obtaining the promised rewards beyond. Far from it. The grammar, at this age, can be used, with practical benefit, only for the forms contained in its accidence ; but here something can be done, which will prove of permanent advantage. A child of eight or nine years old will learn, often with eagerness, and always without much effort, all the regular and irregular verbs ; and that will in general prove to be the best grammar for this purpose, in which they are found spread out and developed in all their forms with the greatest distinctness. After having gone through with all the conjugations of the verbs, both regular and irregular, he can learn without difficulty the little there is to learn in most living languages of the inflexions of the articles, pronouns and adjectives, together with the lists of the indeclinable parts of speech. From this time, too, he can begin to use the dictionary ; and though the reading lesson should still be translated to him by his teacher, as well as afterwards translated to the teacher by the pupil, still the child will be able gradually to advance with less and less assistance, and will soon read books suited to his age without other help than such as his own means will afford him.

Let us now suppose the pupil, whose course we have thus far followed, to be thirteen or fourteen years old, and to have learnt the French, if that be the language he has pursued, as nearly as circumstances would permit, in the same way he has learnt his own language ; let us suppose him to have read a considerable number of children's books in French, such as he would have read if he had been a French boy, and, for the same reason, -- for his amusement ; let us suppose him, by means of his vocabularies and dialogues, and by the help of his teacher, to have made that little progress in speaking to which every one who learns a living language in a natural method is instinctively impelled ; -- let us suppose him, in short, at the age of thirteen or fourteen to have acquired such a use of the language as is suited to his opportunities, his years, and the limited range of his ideas and faculties ; -- what is next to be done ? Undoubtedly, the next thing is, to explain to him the reasons and rules for what he has already learnt. It is in short, the period for teaching the Grammar ; -- not perhaps, the whole of it, at first, but such parts as can be made intelligible and useful ; and afterwards in proportion as the faculties are developed, the remainder. This, he could not probably do, even now, with ease or thoroughness if he were embarrassed with the additional difficulties of learning the vocabulary ; but, having gone through this, and having little else, on which he is required to fasten his attention, it is become a pleasure to him to learn the reasons, rules and explanation of what, under other aspects, is already familiar to him. In this way, he can be carried, first through the definitions and written exercises in the accidence, with a careful review of all the forms it contains ; and afterwards through the syntax, committing the examples perfectly to memory, though not learning the rules by heart ; but from this period, so long as he continues a student of the language, he should continue to study its grammar, either reading or writing its exercises into the foreign language, or pursuing the more difficult portions relating to its idiomatic construction.

This course, beginning in childhood and ending in manhood, is, no doubt, the longest, but it will be found the least tedious to the pupil of any, and at the same time prove the most thorough and effectual. It is the longest, because, beginning with such portions

of the vocabulary, reading, and pronunciation as can never be so well learnt as in the earliest and freshest years of life, it is necessary to wait for the natural growth of the mind before the more difficult parts can be ventured upon, and not to leave it entirely until the maturity of the faculties permits, not merely the words of the higher and more difficult authors to be comprehended, but their thoughts and characteristics to be felt and enjoyed. It is not tedious to the pupil, because from the first to the last, he need not have and ought not to have, anything prescribed to him which could reasonably be felt as a task. And, finally, there is much less consumption of valuable and useful time by it, than by any other, because what is given to it at the earliest period is taken from no occupation so important, and from nothing which can be so well learnt, and what is given to it later should be taken generally from the hours allotted to amusement. Permit me to add, that, from some personal experience and much observation of the application of this method, I have no doubt, it is the best usually within our reach; and that a person who should have gone through with the course of instruction it implies, would, if ever thrown into a country where it should be important for him, be able, in a very short time, to speak with ease and success the language he should thus have acquired.

II. Having thus spoken of the method of teaching a living language to those who have an opportunity of beginning to learn it in childhood, we naturally next consider a class, which, in this country is much larger; — and indeed the largest, consisting of those *who enter on the rudiments of their instruction, between the ages of thirteen or fourteen, and seventeen or eighteen.* And here too, there seems little reason to doubt that the Grammar should not, at the outset, be made so prominent, as it has generally been made; nor its embarrassing and difficult portions be so regularly gone through and pressed upon the young minds of this class of pupils. On the contrary, let an easy reading book, which will be amusing to their age, like one of Mad. Guizot's stories in French; or Soave's *Novelle* in Italian; or the Brother Grimm's *Popular Tales* in German, be given to them at once; — let the teacher carefully translate a small portion at the first lesson explaining the meaning

of each individual word several times over ; — and let the pronunciation and the force of the phrases or idioms be particularly attended to. At the same lesson, let them have a verb or part of a verb to learn by heart, and, when the recitation comes, let it be repeated, and let the translation given out be so made that the English can be rendered for each foreign word, and the foreign word for each English one, when separated from their connexions and put out promiscuously. Let this exercise be pursued until all the verbs regular and irregular have been thoroughly learnt, with the inflexions of the articles, nouns, pronouns and adjectives, so far as the mere forms in the accidence are concerned. Then, while still pursuing the same system of translating some pleasant book, let the teacher begin the Grammar regularly explaining the definitions, reviewing the forms, and reading a short English Exercise into the language to be learnt, that, the next time the pupils may read it to him ; — and let this process of reading and translating both ways, accompanied with regular lessons in the accidence to be committed to memory, be continued until a common narrative book, like Voltaire's *Louis XIV.*, or Schiller's *Thirty Year's War*, can be read with little difficulty. After this, but as late as may be found convenient, the Syntax with its examples, which are to be learnt by heart, and its exercises, which are to be written or read, should be gone through with great care, at least twice, in lessons of moderate length and with much previous explanation from the instructor, while at the same time, the pupils may read the highest authors, which their faculties are sufficiently developed to comprehend — Goethe, Molière, or Cervantes — if their years and tastes permit them to enjoy the first order of imaginative genius.

But here, perhaps, it is needful to stop a moment, and consider *what kind of a Grammar* will be most appropriate to pupils of this class, and, indeed, all classes except the very youngest, and what should be the *general character of the Books given them to read*.

As to the *Grammar*, two common defects should be guarded against. The first of these is, that it should not like Levizac's French Grammar and Noehden's German one, contain either philosophical discussions of the principles of Language in general,

or even of the particular language to which it is devoted, because such inquiries are suited only to persons of mature minds, and, except in very rare cases, useful only to those, to whom the language is native; while, to *all* learners of the rudiments, they are particularly embarrassing, and to learners *of the usual age*, entirely incomprehensible. — The other defect is, the confusion of the accidence and syntax. It is not, perhaps, easy to keep them entirely apart, and, in many very good grammars there is occasionally a want of exactness in observing the distinctions between them; but there is one in quite common use — I mean Wanostrucht's French Grammar, — in which this confusion is assumed as the very plan of the work; so that whatever relates to the articles, for instance, whether form or construction, accidence or syntax, is crowded together under that head, and finished before proceeding to the noun, pronoun, &c, which, in their respective turns, are exhibited and despatched in the same manner. And yet nothing seems of more obvious importance than to keep carefully apart whatever relates to learning the forms of a language, from what relates to its construction, since either is troublesome enough in itself, while the difficulties of each being quite different, those of the accidence arising chiefly from the memory and those of the syntax from the judgment, the union of the two and the confounding of both must constitute and does in fact constitute an embarrassment altogether gratuitous and extremely perplexing.

Supposing, then, these two considerable defects to be avoided; the qualities most important in a good grammar, to learn a living language are; — First, that the definitions and explanations in the accidence and the rules in the syntax be short and clear. Second, that the forms in the accidence be exhibited broadly and plainly; as for instance, that the nouns, pronouns, and adjectives be declined at full length in all their forms, and especially that the verbs both regular and irregular be conjugated and developed in the amplest manner; — some of them both negatively, interrogatively, and negatively-interrogatively. Third, that after each definition and form, and after each rule, there be always several, and generally a considerable number of examples to illustrate it; — short, perspicuous, and as much as possible in an idiomatic and conversational

style, so that when committed to memory, which they always should be, progress may be made, not merely in the grammar but also in the characteristic peculiarities of the language. Fourth, that, after the examples, should follow Exercises in English, to be written or read in the foreign language, and which, like the examples, should be short and conversational, with a translation of the more difficult words and phrases at the bottom, where they can be covered when recited. And lastly, at the end of the whole grammar, it is convenient to have a few easy fables and other lessons with which to begin reading, and a considerable number of dialogues on the most familiar subjects of conversation, such as are best found in the *Manual of Mad. de Genlis*, because she took them down as they happened to be held in her presence, and afterward caused them to be translated into the principal languages of Europe. — A Grammar like this, it may be added, should be short. For the French or the German, it would, perhaps, be expedient to extend it to three hundred or three hundred and fifty pages, in duodecimo; but for either of the other languages usually taught, half that number is abundant.

As to the *books to be used or read* it is possible to make only one or two quite general remarks, since the selection must be governed by circumstances not always within the control of either the teacher or the pupil. It is not well, however, I think, to use collections and extract-books; or, if they cannot be avoided, it is important to take only such as contain each work of an author complete when they give any part of it. Perhaps, however, in many cases, it may be expedient or inevitable to begin with such books; but it can rarely be advisable to go further. They are uninteresting to the learner; they give no proper knowledge, but rather a false impression of the literature they profess to represent; and they are not well adapted to teach even the language itself, because, by changing the manner and style of writing so often, an opportunity is not afforded to become familiar and thorough in any one. It is as if we should attempt to instruct a foreigner in our own language and literature out of two or three of the selections for reading and speaking used in our schools, which, though excellent in the place for which they are designed, would be entirely unsuited to purposes

like this. On all accounts, therefore, it is best to begin, at once, with a good book of the simplest kind like Lessings's Fables in German, or one of Mad. Guizot's Tales in French, and go on afterwards with agreeable and interesting narratives or dramas, like Voltaire's Charles XII. in French, and Moratins's Comedies in Spanish, which should be continued until the language has become really easy. When this point has been attained, there is no reason, except such as may be found in the age, the tastes and the means of the pupils, which should prevent them from being carried through any of the authors of established reputation.\*

III. Having gone through with the modes of instruction for little children and youth, there remains to be considered only one class of learners, and that is one whose numbers are everywhere constantly diminishing — I mean, *those who have already reached the full maturity of their minds*; and, in years, are arrived at least, as far as manhood. With them, except in a few rare and fortunate instances, there is no easy method. The age of a quick and eager memory is gone by; and the reasoning faculties being fully developed choose rather to learn by the analysis of particulars from generals, than by the induction of generals from particulars. With them, therefore, the grammar and its rules must be more important at the outset, and more relied upon during the whole course, than with either of the other classes. They must begin with a strict study of it, and go warily through its definitions and rules, as well as through its forms. It cannot be expected of them to commit to memory the declensions and conjugations, or the examples, with the accuracy any more than with the ease of their earlier years; but still there is no shorter or pleasanter road left to them to attain their object, and if the examples are prepared with proper skill and have an ultimate reference to conversation, they will be found as immediately useful as any exercise such pupils can undertake. From the first lesson they learn, however, they will find it both expedient and agreeable to begin to translate into English; to make the most resolute efforts to accommodate their organs to the pro-

\* Lest, however, it should seem, that I have proposed an expensive course, I will add, that all the books it implies, need not cost in any one of the modern languages usually taught, more than from ten to twelve or fifteen dollars.

nunciation ; and, as soon as possible, they should begin to write the language and write it constantly and a great deal. But, during the whole course of their pursuit, their main reliance must be on the grammar, and on such books as they may be able to read with interest and pleasure.

We have now considered, as far as the limits of such a discourse will permit, the different classes of persons who are to be taught, and the different methods that have seemed, from experience, suitable to be used with each ; — never forgetting, however, that in practice, there is no sharp and exact division of classes, by age, but that one is constantly running into another, and that the pupils who would fall under each may often need some modification of the system of teaching proposed for the whole, in order to accommodate it to their respective characters and wants. The divisions, however, that we have gone through, have often been adopted in practice, sometimes because they were thought judicious ; but often, perhaps, because they seemed natural or inevitable ; while, at the same time, the general methods of instruction recommended have had the sanction of much experience and success, though rather in other countries than in our own. It only remains, therefore, to say a few words on two points immediately connected with the whole subject.

The first is, the *general mode of teaching* all classes and all individuals. Let the instructor bring his mind as much as possible into contact with that of his pupil, so as to feel precisely and fully the nature of the obstacles and difficulties which are from day to day encountered ; and then let him remove them all, as far as may be in his power, by personal explanation and assistance. For it is a great mistake to suppose, that the learning a living language, which nature teaches every day so faithfully, without an effort on the part of her scholars, can be made too easy. On the contrary, let the teacher facilitate the progress of his pupils by all the means in his power, explaining everything to them, translating their lessons for them, and serving them, as far as he can, instead of Grammar, Dictionary and Commentary ; only requiring, that the pupils, on their side, shall faithfully retain what has been thus sedulously imparted to them, and be able afterwards correctly and understand-

ingly to recite or explain it. Above all, let not the recitations themselves, become merely dry and hard examinations in order to ascertain whether prescribed tasks have been accomplished ; but let them be seized upon as the golden opportunities for teaching, — as the fortunate moments when the seed will fall on good ground because the pupils will so eagerly and gratefully receive whatever of explanation and assistance may be given them. Let, therefore, the teacher always go first and lead, instead of following to drive his pupils ; and especially let him shed all the light of his own knowledge upon the path, which is so familiar and easy to *him*, but which, to *them* is new and full of difficulties. Thus, let him explain and illustrate the rules until it is certain they are comprehended before they are studied. Let him translate beforehand the exercises that are to be prepared, so that they may not only be well done, but done easily and pleasantly. And from time to time, let him read into somewhat free and choice English large portions of the book his pupils may happen to be studying, that they may themselves acquire the power of selecting appropriate words and phrases, and learn, what they can in no other way learn so easily or so well, the corresponding idioms and respective peculiarities of the two languages. In short, let them be *taught*, as well as *required to learn*, and let their recitations, instead of being merely strict examinations become pleasant opportunities for acquiring further knowledge and making easier progress.

The other circumstance to which I referred, is, *the direction to be given to all studies in a living language* in order to insure the greatest amount of success ; — the point, I mean, to be set before both teacher and pupil, not indeed, as the one always or even generally to be attained, but as the one, which may be most safely relied upon to determine their general course, and towards which whatever progress they may make, should be directed. This point is, the speaking the language ; and the reason why it should mainly govern our course in attempting to learn it is, that, what is idiomatic and peculiar to it, its particles and its phrases, is entirely the result of its use as a spoken language ; that in these particles and idioms reside always the difficulties, as well as the essential genius and power of every language ; and, that, therefore, as we advance

in acquiring its vocabulary from reading and its construction from the accidence and syntax, we should still so select the books we use and the grammar we study, as to be continually making progress in our knowledge of the spoken language and its idiomatic difficulties.

But, it may be answered, “we never intend to speak it; — we only wish to learn to read it, that we may have free access to its written treasures and especially its classic authors; — we do not propose to visit foreign countries, but we wish to read and enjoy at home, Schiller, and Molière, Cervantes, and Dante.” Be it so. But what are the chief difficulties in the way of this undertaking, and what is there in these authors that makes it necessary they should be read in the original rather than in translations? Is it not precisely those felicities and peculiarities of idiom and inflexion, which are the result of the formation and use of the language itself as a spoken one; as the vehicle of the feelings and passions of men in the sudden turns of life, its changes and its adventures? Consider, too, who these leading authors are; to what class they belong; and what constitute their characteristic claims, attractions and value. They are precisely the authors in whom the peculiar genius of their respective languages stands forth in the boldest relief; — those in whom the distinctive features of the national temper and character are most prominent; — those, in short, who come to us fresh from the feelings and attributes of the mass of the people they represent, and full of the peculiarities of thought, idiom, and expression which separate that people from all others, and constitute them a distinct portion of mankind. That such authors cannot be understood without some knowledge of the popular feeling and colloquial idiom, with which their minds have been nourished and of which their works are full, hardly needs to be urged or made more apparent. Take the case of the great Masters in our own English. Can any one, who is entirely ignorant of the phraseology, inflexions, and shadings of our spoken language, comprehend the picturesque but homely directness of Chaucer, or the exquisite delicacy of Spenser, or the unapproached power of nature in Shakspeare? Nay, can such a one know in what is hidden the idiomatic simplicity of Addison or Cowper; or can he even read

his own contemporaries, Miss Edgeworth or Sir Walter Scott? Nor is it in any respect different in the other living languages, which have succeeded in vindicating for their authors a place among the classical literature of the world. The great masters, in all ages and in all nations, have built on the same foundations and can be successfully approached only in one way. For who can pretend to understand or estimate the untold riches of the elder Drama, of Spain or of its early romantic and popular Ballads; or who will venture to open *Don Quixote*, who knows nothing of the peculiarities of the Spanish as a spoken tongue? Or who can draw near to Goethe and Schiller and Tieck in the spirit in which their power is revealed, unless he feels in some degree that he is holding intercourse with contemporaries who speak to him, as it were, with living voices? Or who can comprehend the quaint simplicity of Lafontaine, or the rich humor and genuine comic power of Molière, if he have never turned his thoughts towards that conversational idiom, to which each resorted for whatever is peculiar both in his beauty and his power. Or, finally, — to take instances, which are the more striking because they seem at first the least susceptible of such application — who can be aware either of the sublimity or the tenderness of Dante, unless he studies that unwritten language from which *alone* this first and greatest master of Italian Poetry could draw his materials or his inspiration; or who else can imagine himself able to comprehend Alfieri, who, casting aside the accumulated literature of five centuries, went constantly, as he himself tells us, to the thronged market place of Florence, there to gather from the lips of the peasantry and the populace those phrases and inflexions, which afterwards thrilled with horror the audiences of Tuscany and Lombardy, and now leave his own great name to close up that long and bright series, at the head of which stands the solemn form of Dante himself. Indeed, on this subject, there is no delusion, no mistake. We *know* that we can none of us read the great Masters in any foreign literature, or enjoy them like natives, because we cannot speak their language like natives. For, the characteristic peculiarities, and essential beauty and power of their gifted minds are concealed in those idiomatic phrases, those unobtrusive particles, those racy combinations

which, as they were first produced by the prompt eloquence and passions of immediate intercourse, can be comprehended and felt only by those who seek them in the sources from which they flow ; so that, other things being equal, *he* will always be found best able to read and enjoy the great writers in a foreign language, who, in studying it, — whether his progress have been little or much — has never ceased to remember that it is a living and a spoken tongue.

Gentlemen ; The general views, so imperfectly developed in this discussion are not new. They coincide with the suggestions made by Lord Bacon, and with the systems pursued and recommended by Cardinal Wolsey and Roger Ascham, by Milton and Locke, and by the vast majority of skilful teachers in those parts of Europe, where Education at the present time, is the best conducted and advanced the furthest. The substance of the whole is, that instruction, to be as effectual as it ought to be, should be communicated not only by books, which are indeed the great means of acquisition, and facilitate it more than all others united, but also by constant and familiar and laborious explanation from the teacher, skilfully adapted to the age, character and progress of his pupil. Before the invention of printing, and, indeed, for some time afterwards, while books were still rare, this oral instruction was necessarily almost the only mode of communicating knowledge not merely of the living languages, but, in general, of all other subjects. Gradually, however, as books were multiplied and especially when they became so much improved, they began to be trusted too much with the business of Education, until, in many branches, and certainly in that of the living languages, results were claimed from them, which it is quite impossible they should produce. In our own country this error was, at one time, all but universal ; and even now, I fear, is common. But it is acknowledged by some, perhaps by many ; and, is in the sure way to be eradicated by the success of those teachers, who rely not merely upon the dead letter of books, but also upon that living knowledge which is imparted only by living explanation ; — nay, which is communicated by the very tones of the voice and the expression of the countenance with a vivacity and effect never found or felt by the most eager lover of acquisition in a cold and silent page.





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